

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 368 129

EC 302 884

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TITLE Selecting Behavioral Interventions for Individualized Intervention Plans.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of Teacher Educators for Children with Behavioral Disorders (17th, Tempe, AZ, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Modification; *Behavior Problems; *Classification; *Classroom Techniques; *Decision Making; Discipline; Educational Planning; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethics; Intervention; Negative Reinforcement; Positive Reinforcement; Standards; Systems Approach
IDENTIFIERS *Aversive Stimuli; *Behavior Management

ABSTRACT

This paper cites ethical provisions and professional standards that affect the selection of behavioral interventions that will benefit exceptional individuals without undermining their dignity. A three-category system that classifies behavioral interventions on the basis of their intrusiveness or restrictiveness is presented. Interventions are organized into positive interventions, negative interventions, and aversive interventions. Steps in moving through the three categories, and documenting their implementation, are discussed. School systems are encouraged to develop systemwide decision-making systems that provide a rational and defensible basis for making ethical decisions about behavior change efforts and for defending those decisions. Teachers are urged to develop their own classroom system in the absence of a systemwide policy. Figures include: a list of possible target behaviors; tentative classification of possible target behaviors; a parent permission form to implement aversive interventions; and intervention planning forms documenting the use of positive strategies, negative and aversive strategies, and stimulus control strategies. (JDD)

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Selecting Behavioral Interventions
for
Individualized Intervention Plans

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Paper presented at the seventeenth annual TECBD National
Conference on Severe Behavioral Disorders of Children and Youth;
Tempe, AZ, 1993.

EC 302884

Selecting Behavioral Interventions for Individualized Intervention Plans

Selecting behavioral interventions for target behaviors should be done in a systematic fashion. A systematic approach provides a defensible rationale for selecting interventions. Good professional practice requires that behavior change agents select only target behaviors for which there is an educational justification and select the least intrusive intervention appropriate for changing the target behavior. The Council for Exceptional Children's Code of Ethics (1983) has at least one provision that directly bears on this requirement:

III. Special education professionals engage in professional activities which benefit exceptional individuals, their families, other colleagues, students or research subjects.

In addition, there is an increasing likelihood that teachers and school systems can be successfully sued for malpractice (Rothstein, 1985). A lack of recognized standards for professional practice have, in part, protected educators in the past. Successful malpractice litigation requires a recognized standard against which to judge professional decisions and behavior. Many professional organizations like the Council for Exceptional Children (1983) have adopted such standards. At least two of the standards for profession practice adopted by CEC bear upon the use of behavior interventions.

1.2.1.1 Apply only those disciplinary methods and behavioral procedures which they have been instructed to use and which do not undermine the dignity of the individual or the basic human rights of exceptional persons (such as corporal punishment).

1.2.1.5 Refrain from aversive techniques unless repeated trials of other methods have failed and then only after consultation with parents and appropriate agency officials.

Adoption of professional standards increases the chances for successful litigation against both teachers and schools. One aspect of good professional practice is a process for making decisions. The process should aid good decision making and make those decisions defensible. Such a process also provides a mechanism for holding individuals accountable for their intervention choices.

The following process will work in a class, school or on a system-wide basis. However, a broadly based system-wide process

is the most desirable. The first step in developing a process for selecting intervention procedures is to develop a system for classifying target behaviors (Center, 1993). To begin developing a process, you must first determine the number of categories to use. Two categories are the minimum for a classification system. A three category system is used in the illustrative example that follows. Next, you should set criteria for classifying behaviors into the categories. Category criteria make it possible to classify any target behavior that arises. Illustrative criteria are also provided in the discussion below. Finally, classify each target behavior that you must plan an intervention for before selecting an intervention (see example in Figures 1 & 2).

The following discussion attempts to classify behavioral interventions on the basis of their intrusiveness or restrictiveness. Interventions are organized into Positive Interventions, Negative Interventions and Aversive Interventions. This classification is strictly my opinion and is only illustrative. Deitz and Hummel (1978) offer a different organization based on three different considerations. They organize interventions on the basis of effectiveness, efficiency (defined in terms of teacher time required) and ethics. The organization presented here probably comes closest to Deitz and Hummel's ethical dimension for classifying interventions.

Nuisance Behavior

1. Nuisance Behavior Criteria
 - a. Temporarily tolerable
and
 - b. Moderately disruptive.
and/or
 - c. Moderately interferes with learning

You should use an individualized intervention plan for a behavior in the nuisance category only after trying more efficient techniques. First, you should try routine management procedures like signal control, proximity control, ignoring or a student conference (Center, 1993). Next, you should try more structured techniques like self-monitoring or a contract. If you must use a formal, individualized intervention, start with a positive intervention strategy (Center, 1993). You should only consider a negative intervention strategy if a positive strategy doesn't work. You can never justify the use of an aversive intervention strategy for nuisance behavior.

Document the failure of a positive intervention with data from a carefully planned and conducted intervention. Documentation of a carefully planned intervention can best be done through the use of standard intervention planning forms (Center, 1993). Examples of such forms are illustrated in the Appendix. Documentation of failure can best be done through the data collected while executing an intervention plan. The

plan allows the adequacy of the intervention to be evaluated and the data allows the effect of the intervention to be evaluated.

1. Positive Intervention Strategies: These strategies have one of two goals. They may try to substitute an appropriate behavior for an inappropriate behavior (see a below). They also may try to change the level of a behavior to bring it within acceptable limits (see b & c below). The following are examples of frequently used positive strategies that rely on reinforcement to change behavior.

- a. Differential Reinforcement of Other Behavior (DRO).
 - 1. Incompatible responses.
 - 2. Alternative responses.
- b. Differential Reinforcement of a Lower Level of Behavior (DRL).
- c. Differential Reinforcement of a Higher Level of Behavior (DRH).

Problem Behavior

- 2. Problem Behavior Criteria
 - a. A Nuisance Behavior resistant to change
or
 - b. Destructive or Highly disruptive
and/or
 - c. Potentially dangerous
and/or
 - d. Significantly Interferes with learning

For behavior in the problem category that meets only criterion (d), you should use a positive strategy first. You can justify the initial use of a negative intervention strategy (Center, 1993) if the behavior meets any of the other criteria or some combination of them. When you use a negative strategy, you should combine it with DRO to replace the target behavior. Your goal should always be to build a student's behavioral repertoire, not diminish it. You should only consider an aversive intervention strategy for a target behavior after a negative strategy fails. You should be able to document that the negative strategy did not work. The data should come from a carefully planned and conducted intervention.

2. Negative Reduction Strategies: These strategies try to eliminate an inappropriate behavior. The following are examples of frequently used negative strategies.

- a. Over Correction (OC)
 - 1. Positive Practice
 - 2. Restitutional
- b. Response Cost (RC)
- c. Time-out from Reinforcement (TO-R)

Serious Problem Behavior

3. Serious Problem Behavior
 - a. A Problem Behavior resistant to change
 - b. Clearly dangerous to self or others

You can justify the initial use of an aversive intervention strategy (Center, 1993) for behavior in the serious problem category that meets criterion (b). If the behavior only meets criterion (a) you can not justify use of an aversive strategy unless the behavior also meets (b) or (c) and (d) in the second category. You should also combine an aversive strategy with DRO. You should not employ aversive strategies without prior administrative and parental approval. If you anticipate the possible need for using an aversive strategy with a special education student, obtain approval in the student's IEP. If the student is not in special education or approval was not sought in the IEP, you should get a signed consent form (see Figure 3). The importance of following procedures similar to the above is illustrated in Hayes v. Unified School Dist. (1987). In this case, a student sued, under the Civil Rights Act, charging his school system with violation of his due process rights under the Fourteenth Admendment to the U.S. Constitution for confining him in a time-out room. The court ruled against his claim on the grounds that the school had provided his parents with written notification of their intent to use the intervention and had discussed it with them in a parent conference.

You must be able to document the effectiveness of an aversive strategy to justify its continued use. The one exception is use of an isolation procedure such as a time-out room. You can, under some circumstances, justify such a procedure on protective grounds.

3. Aversive Reduction Strategies: These strategies also attempt to eliminate an inappropriate behavior. The following are examples of frequently used aversive strategies.

- a. Time-out through Isolation (TO-I)
- b. Presentation of an Aversive Stimulus (PAS)

Remember, whenever you use a negative or aversive reduction strategy, combine it with DRO. By following this procedure, you will always have a strategy that tries to achieve a positive outcome, not just eliminate behavior.

In conclusion, I recommend that school systems develop a system wide decision making system like the one illustrated here. It need not be identical to this system, but it should provide a rational and defensible basis for making ethical decisions about behavior change efforts and for defending those decisions. I also recommend that individual teachers develop their own classroom system in the absence of a system wide policy.

List of Some Possible Target Behaviors

Talking-out
Destructiveness
Physical aggression
Verbal threats
Use of a weapon
Sleeping
Self-injurious behavior
Threatening with a weapon
Lying or Cheating
Fire setting
Vandalism
Disobedience
Oppositional
Dawdling
Argumentative
Excessive teasing
Making noises
Excessive shyness
Tantrums
Out-of-seat
Social withdrawal
Boasting
Possession of a weapon
Overly dependent
Exhibitionism

FIGURE TWO. Sample list of possible target behaviors that might be classified into the illustrative categories discussed.

Tentative Classification of Possible Target Behaviors

Nuisance Behaviors:

- Talking-out
- Lying or Cheating
- Dawdling
- Argumentative
- Excessive teasing
- Excessive shyness
- Making noises
- Boasting
- Overly dependent
- Sleeping

Problem Behaviors:

- Destructiveness
- Verbal threats
- Vandalism
- Disobedience
- Oppositional
- Tantrums
- Out-of-seat
- Social withdrawal
- Possession of a weapon
- Exhibitionism

Serious Problem Behavior:

- Physical aggression
- Threatening with a weapon
- Self-injurious behavior
- Use of a weapon
- Fire setting

FIGURE TWO. List of target behaviors tentatively classified into categories for illustrative purposes. In practice, a behavior would be classified only after it was being considered for a planned, individualized intervention.

PARENT PERMISSION FORM

I _____ give _____ permission
to use the following aversive intervention technique(s):

with my child _____ for the purpose of
modifying behavior that has been judged to be dangerous to
my child or others in the school setting or behaviors that
are highly disruptive or that significantly interfere with
my child's or other student's learning and which has not
responded satisfactorily to other less drastic intervention
techniques. I have had the nature of the above techniques
and the manner of their use explained to me. I understand
the techniques, their potential dangers and benefits and the
conditions of their use. Further, I understand that I may
withdraw this permission at any time and for any reason.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

Position: _____

FIGURE THREE. The above is an illustration of a possible consent form. You are advised to seek legal counsel from your school system's attorney before preparing or using any parent consent form.

References

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A P P E N D I X

Planning Forms

(Center, 1993)

BASIC INTERVENTION PLAN I
(Positive Strategies)

Student: _____ Date: _____

Teacher: _____

1. The target behavior: _____

(Note: This will be the substitute behavior, not the problem behavior, in interventions using DRO)

2. Objective for the target behavior:

3. Operational definition for the target behavior:

4. The measurement technique: _____

a. Description of the data recording procedures:

b. Conditions during baseline observations:

c. Plan an A-B graph format, with labels, to record data on.

5. Reinforcement strategy: _____

a. Planned reinforcer:

b. Natural reinforcer to be paired with the planned reinforcer for maintenance:

c. The initial reinforcement schedule: _____

d. Description of the intervention procedure:

e. Schedule for implementing the intervention:

1. ___ Daily

a. ___ Continuously

b. ___ Intermittently (Specify time(s) _____)

2. ___ Less than daily (Specify schedule _____)

a. ___ Continuously

b. ___ Intermittently (Specify time(s) _____)

6. The back-up strategy, if the problem behavior gets out of control, during the intervention: _____

a. Criteria for implementing the back-up strategy:

b. Description of the back-up procedure:

7. Criteria for failure of the intervention:

8. The alternative intervention if the planned intervention fails:

ADVANCED INTERVENTION SUPPLEMENT

Use ONLY in conjunction with a basic intervention plan.

Student: _____ Date: _____

Teacher: _____

1. The target behavior: _____

2. Reinforcement procedures:

a. Planned reinforcer: _____

b. Natural reinforcer: _____

c. The reinforcement schedules:

1. Initial schedule: _____

2. Terminal schedule: _____

3. Schedule increment: _____

d. Schedule stretching criteria:

1. Performance criterion: _____

2. Consistency criterion: _____

(Note: The two criteria above will often be the same criteria in the objective for the target behavior.)

3. Schedule strain criterion: _____

(Note: If shaping the performance characteristics of a response, don't begin schedule stretching until the final approximation has been established and/or all planned prompts have been faded.)

3. Intervention procedures:

a. If using successive approximations to the target behavior:

1. Specify the approximations:

2. Specify the criteria for shifting from one approximation to the next:

(Note: When approximations are performance levels and not performance characteristics, schedule stretching and successive approximations may be concurrent.)

- b. If using prompts in the intervention:

1. Specify the prompt hierarchy from the initial to the terminal prompt:

2. Criteria for fading the prompt(s):

- a. Performance criterion: _____

- b. Consistency criterion: _____

(Note: The two criteria above will often be the same criteria in the objective for the target behavior.)

3. Describe procedures for fading prompt(s):

4. Describe procedures for generalization as appropriate:

- a. GEN across agents:

- b. GEN across settings:

NOTES:

BASIC INTERVENTION PLAN II
(Negative and Aversive Strategies)

Student: _____ Date: _____

Teacher: _____

1. The target behavior: _____

(Note: This will be the problem behavior.)

2. Objective for the target behavior:

3. Operational definition for the target behavior:

4. The measurement technique: _____

a. Description of the data recording procedures:

b. Conditions during baseline observations:

c. Plan an A-B graph format, with labels, to record data on.

5. Intervention strategy: _____

a. Description of the intervention procedure:

b. Schedule for implementing the intervention:

1. ___ Daily

a. ___ Continuously

b. ___ Intermittently (Specify time(s) _____)

2. ___ Less than daily (Specify schedule _____)

a. ___ Continuously

b. ___ Intermittently (Specify time(s) _____)

6. The back-up strategy, if the problem behavior gets out of control, during the intervention: _____

a. Criteria for implementing the back-up strategy:

b. Description of the back-up procedure:

7. Criteria for failure of the intervention:

8. The alternative intervention if the planned intervention fails:

NOTE: Negative and aversive intervention strategies should be accompanied by positive intervention strategies to enhance behavioral repertoire.

BASIC INTERVENTION PLAN III
(Stimulus Control Strategies)

Student: _____ Date: _____

Teacher: _____

1. The target behavior: _____

(Note: This will be the problem behavior.)

2. Objective for the target behavior:

3. Operational definition for the target behavior:

4. The measurement technique: _____

a. Description of the data recording procedures:

b. Conditions during baseline observations:

c. Plan an A-B graph format, with labels, to record data on.

5. Stimulus Control Strategy:

a. Description of the intervention procedure:

b. Prompts used in the intervention:

1. Specify the prompt hierarchy from the initial to the terminal prompt:

2. Criteria for fading the prompt(s):

a. Performance criterion: _____

b. Consistency criterion: _____

(Note: The two criteria above will often be the same criteria in the objective for the target behavior.)

c. Describe procedures for fading prompt(s):

6. Describe procedures for generalization as appropriate:

a. GEN across agents:

b. GEN across settings:

7. Schedule for implementing the intervention:

a. ___ Daily

1. ___ Continuously

2. ___ Intermittently (Specify time(s) _____)

b. ___ Less than daily (Specify schedule _____)

1. ___ Continuously

2. ___ Intermittently (Specify time(s) _____)

8. The back-up strategy, if the problem behavior gets out of control, during the intervention: _____

a. Criteria for implementing the back-up strategy:

b. Description of the back-up procedure:

9. Criteria for failure of the intervention:

10. The alternative intervention if the planned intervention fails:

NOTES: